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ABSTRACT

The effects of the victim's emotional style on social reactions to the rape victim are examined. Of specific interest were perceptions of victim credibility, degree to which she would later be socially accepted and the degree to which the observers believed the victim found the rape unpleasant. Subjects (N=55) viewed two videotapes depicting a prewritten interview between a psychologist and a rape victim. In one tape, the victim was emotionally upset and in the other, the victim was emotionally subdued. After viewing the tape, participants were asked questions within five areas about the rape incident and the victim. Their responses are discussed. (Author/LPB)

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Victim Emotional Response: Effects on Social Reaction to Victims of Rape

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Victim Emotional Response: Effects on Social Reaction to Victims of Rape

Recent research has indicated that certain characteristics of rape victims influence observers' reactions to them (e.g., Calhoun, Selby & Warring, 1976; Cann, Calhoun & Selby, Note 1; Feldman-Summers & Lindner, 1976; Jones & Aronson, 1973). One characteristic that would seem likely to affect observers' reactions, the victim's emotional response following the rape, has not received systematic attention. This variable is especially relevant since Burgess and Holmstrom (1974) have noted two distinct patterns of emotional reaction in actual rape victims. The "controlled" victim is outwardly calm, without obvious signs of emotional distress. The "expressed" victim, on the other hand, clearly exhibits her emotional anguish about the rape. Although all rape victims experience psychological distress, there is a difference in their overt emotional behaviors.

Lerner's "just world" theory (Lerner, Miller, & Holmes, 1975) provides one possible prediction regarding observer's reactions. If we view the emotionally "expressed" victim as evidencing greater suffering, the "just world" theory would suggest that she should be rejected more than the "controlled" victim. This type of effect was found by Jones and Aronson (1973) when the victim's respectability was manipulated to create the differing levels of suffering. An alternative prediction is possible in the case of the controlled victim. Her behavior may be incongruent with observers' expectations for rape victims. Although the controlled victim does experience distress, her lack of clear external signs of it

may lead observers to see her as unusually calm. One consequence of engaging in situationally inappropriate behavior is likely to be social rejection (Calhoun, Selby, & Wroten, 1977).

A second consequence of the victim's emotional style following rape might involve her perceived credibility. Two popular myths about rape are that many cases involve false accusations, and that women "enjoy" being raped. The controlled victim's reaction may lead observers to the conclusion that she did not find the rape as unpleasant as the expressed victim, and they may also be more likely to assume she is not telling the complete truth about the incident. It would be difficult to assume that the emotional victim found the rape "enjoyable", and thus, her version of the incident may be considered more credible. Extending this idea, observers also might be inclined to assign greater causal responsibility for the rape to the controlled victim.

The purpose of the present investigation was to examine the effects of the victim's emotional style on social reactions to the rape victim. Of specific interest were the perception of the victim's credibility, the degree to which she would be socially accepted and the degree to which observers believed the victim had found the rape unpleasant. In addition, ratings of the victim's perceived causal role and the perceived causal role played by external factors were included.

Method

Participants were 55 undergraduate students (29 females and 26 males) who volunteered for the study and received points toward the semester grade.

Two video tapes were prepared, depicting an interview between a

psychologist and a rape victim. The two actors were a white male clinical psychologist in his late twenties and a white female in her late twenties. In both tapes, the victim indicated that as she was returning to her car in a parking lot the night before, at about 9:30, a man forced her into her car and raped her.

In one tape the victim was clearly emotionally upset, whereas in the other tape the victim was calm and emotionally subdued. The scripts for the two tapes were almost identical, except for the emotionally expressive statements of the victim. Pretesting on two independent groups of raters indicated that the "expressed" victim was seen as significantly more emotionally upset, $t(25)=3.8, p<.001$ than the "controlled" victim.

Participants were informed that they were taking part in a study of reactions to victims of crime, and that they would be asked to respond to a rape victim. They were given a folder containing a consent letter from a "Rape Crisis Center" (with all identifying information marked out) and asked to watch the videotaped interview. Participants viewed the tape in groups of no more than eight.

After viewing the tape, participants were asked a series of questions assessing five areas about the rape incident and the rape victim. Three items (Rubin, 1974) dealt with the degree to which respondents would like or socially accept the victim (Most people would react favorably to her after a brief acquaintance. I think this rape victim is one of those people who would quickly win respect. I think that I would like this individual if I met her in person). Two items assessed the unpleasantness of the experience for the victim (To what extent do you think the victim

obtained some degree of enjoyment from the rape? To what extent do you think think the victim found the experience completely unpleasant?).[2] Two items assessed causal attributions to factors external to the victim (To what extent do you think this rape could have happened to any woman in this same situation? To... occurred simply because the victim was at the wrong place at the wrong time and not because of anything the victim did?). Two items probed the victim's perceived credibility (Most people will find the victim's description of the rape episode completely believable. I think the victim's description of the rape episode is completely true). Two items involved the degree to which the victim was seen as having taken preventive measures (To what extent do you think the victim should have known better than to be in the situation where she was raped? To... the rape occurred because the victim failed to be sufficiently careful?). Responses to the liking items were on nine-point scales, and responses to all other items were on six-point scales. Ratings in each item category were summed.

Results

A multivariate analysis of variance on the five dependent measures indicated significant effects for type of emotional response, F (5,47)= 4.96, $p<.001$, sex of respondent, F (5,47)=5.32, $p<.001$, and the sex by emotional style interaction, F (5,47)=4.13, $p<.005$.

Univariate analysis indicated that males (M=16.0) gave higher social acceptance ratings to the victim than did females (M=11.9), F (1,51)=9.01, $p<.01$. A borderline effect suggested that the rape victim who was emotionally upset (M=15.2) was accorded a higher degree of social acceptance

than the victim who was emotionally calm (M=12.6), F (1,51)=3.71, $p < .06$.

The measure of the perceived unpleasantness[3] of the rape indicated that males (M=5.04) saw the rape as less unpleasant for the victim than did females (M=3.5), F (1,54)=9.16, $p < .005$. The emotionally expressive victim (M=3.3) was perceived as having experienced significantly greater distress during the rape than the emotionally controlled victim (M=4.8) F (1,54)=6.09, $p < .02$. The interaction, however, indicated that males and females were differentially affected by the victim's emotional style, F (1,54)=14.28, $p < .001$. Whereas males tended to have similar reactions to both the emotionally controlled (M=4.8) and the emotionally upset (M=5.2) victims, females indicated the emotionally controlled victim (M=4.8) had found the rape significantly less unpleasant than did the emotionally upset victim (M=1.8), t (24)=4.79, $p < .001$. The reactions of females were clearly affected by the victim's emotional style, while reactions of the male participants was not. Univariate analyses indicated that the other measures were not affected by sex of respondent or by victim emotional style.

Discussion

The present findings indicated that the victim's emotional reaction following the rape did not have a significant impact on her perceived responsibility for the rape. This result is not surprising. Apparently observers did not make differential inferences concerning the victim's pre-rape behavior based upon her post-rape reactions. Similarly, the

failure to obtain any effects on the victims' perceived credibility suggests that emotional style may be considered irrelevant for evaluating the victim's account of the episode.

The results clearly indicated that the victim's emotional reaction did affect the perceived unpleasantness of the rape for the victim and the social acceptance of the victim by observers. As expected, the emotionally expressed victim was perceived to have experienced greater distress during the rape. The interaction of sex by emotional response indicated that males' perceptions of the victim's suffering during the rape were unaffected by her emotional reaction, whereas females regarded the emotional victim as having experienced significantly more discomfort. This interaction may reflect the greater ease with which females assume the perspective of the female rape victim (Calhoun, Selby & Warring, 1976; Heim, Malamuth & Feshbach, Note 2). By assuming the victim's perspective to a greater extent, females might then be expected to be more influenced by information provided about the victim's emotional state than would males. The overall tendency of males to perceive the rape as less unpleasant reinforces this interpretation. The specific conditions under which such sex by victim behavior interaction would be expected to occur still remain to be clarified.

Present results also indicate that the emotionally upset victim may be accorded a higher degree of social acceptance than the emotionally calm victim. This contradicts the "just world" theory prediction that the emotionally upset (i.e., "suffering victim") will be derogated more than the emotionally calm victim. One possible explanation may be that observers

expect rape victims to be upset and have psychological difficulties as a result of the rape (Calhoun, Selby & King, 1976), and controlled rape victims are viewed as exhibiting behavior which is incongruent with having been sexually assaulted. Consequently, the controlled victim is perceived as less socially desirable. This bodes poorly for the rape victim who attempts to deal firmly with her emotions and maintain a controlled appearance following the rape.

Reference Notes

1. Cann, A., Calhoun, L. G., and Selby, J. W. Sexual experience as a factor in reactions to rape victims. Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, San Francisco, 1977.

2. Heim, M. M., Malamuth, N. and Feshbach, S. Sex differences in perceptions and punishment of rape. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Psychological Association Convention, San Francisco, 1977.

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Footnotes

[1]Requests for copies of this paper should be sent to Lawrence G. Calhoun, Department of Psychology, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, NC 28223.

[2]We are not suggesting that victims find rape pleasant. We are investigating the cultural belief.

[3]Lower numbers indicate higher perceived unpleasantness.